

BIRTH, ADOLESCENCE, MARRIAGE

381

those just described. The giving of them at this time is not obligatory, nor does it affect the validity of the coming marriage. It is merely a mark of friendly feeling between the two groups of relatives; and, by adding to the importance of the event, increases the parental strength of the unborn children.

If either X or Y should die during the period of engagement, the presents, or their equivalent, must be returned to the donors. No formal methods are employed to ensure this, but the force of public opinion suffices to compel a man to do that which is proper; in fact, he is anxious to do so. If Y should die, an effort is made to replace her with a sister, cousin, or other close relative, so that the friendly relations entered upon by the two families may not be lost. The gifts mutually given by the two families may be returned and redemanded or the relatives simply take Y's place without further arrangement. Sometimes, in spite of the wishes of their parents and the elaborate rites carried out, either X or Y breaks the engagement by going to live with somebody else. It is then a mark of pride for the family of the offender to return the gifts they have received, and almost equally a mark of honour for the aggrieved party to give back what has been borrowed upon them, in order to demonstrate how little value they place on the possession of goods.

Though a lengthy engagement is desirable, it may be cancelled. If, for example, one of X's relatives should die before the usual period has elapsed, Y's father may suggest an immediate wedding. He knows that X's family will have heavy expenses in connection with the burial and mourning rites, hence it is courteous to offer a quick marriage with the financial advantages accruing to them at the ceremony. In this case, X either does not work at all for Y's family, or for only a short time. Moreover, if Y reaches marriageable age without her father receiving suitable proposals, he can himself take the initiative by consulting the parents of an eligible young man. If the suggestion is agreeable, the engagement is announced in the manner already described, and the marriage takes place

989
 525
 761
 [54]
 [228]

Devotees perceiving supernatural beings, carried out with full vigour until a few years ago, further fostered belief in them among participants and initiated alike. Consequently, many of the young and middle-aged men claim to have own visions similar to those of their elders. The incident already described (I, p. 30) of the stump which was thought to be a grisly bear is a case in point. On another occasion a young man mentioned casually that a few evenings before he had seen a headless man walking along the road and that, wishing to view the phenomenon more closely, he had tried unsuccessfully to make a match. The reason was obvious to him; the power of the supernatural vision prevented the match from lighting. The man, who was undoubtedly convinced of the apparition, may have seen something, perhaps a wheel of fog, somewhat resembling a headless body. A white man would have considered such a sight impossible and absurd, whereas the Bella Coola felt little surprise at the appearance of such a creature and promptly accepted it for what it seemed to be.

Mental activities as well as optical illusions are likewise ascribed to supernatural agency. These include profound agitations of the mind, and even what a white man would consider a passing thought. For instance, one morning when about to start work, a certain man stated that he would have good fortune during the day, that a dream had foretold it. At the time he was moving to a new house and needed help to shift a heavy stove. During the course of the day a number of white men happened to pass by and stopped to speak to him; the stove was mentioned, they offered to move it for him, and did so easily and quickly.

"There you are," said the man, "I told you I was going to have good fortune today."

On another occasion the same man claimed to have felt that misfortune had happened to him and even learnt that one of his sons had been arrested on a charge of drunkenness and disorderly conduct. The man affirmed that he had this premonition before being aware of its cause.

MEDICINE, MAGIC, TABOO

681

and those who have knowledge of them are sorcerers. Even a man of this kind is not outside the pale of society unless he practices indiscriminately; members of the *Amiat* society, for example, frequently employ one to kill an individual who has offended against their regulations (I, p. 740). A man is regarded as a sorcerer not on account of his knowledge but on account of the ends to which he applies it.

Closely related to, if not identical with, the belief that certain consequences follow certain acts, is the conviction that the infraction of ritual prohibitions brings disaster. There are many such taboos, for so they may be called. Though most important at the critical periods of life, puberty, pregnancy, while observing ceremonial chastity, and so forth, there are many which must be obeyed at all times.

Restrictions pertaining to the river and regulations at birth and death have already been described. Like magical acts, these often verge on the religious owing to the belief that disregard offends supernatural beings. On the whole, however, it seems as if most infractions bring their own punishment without intervention of higher powers, a concept which throws taboos into the category of magic rather than of religion, with the ever-present proviso that the two cannot be separated entirely from one another. With them may be associated a number of ritual acts connected with fishing and hunting in which, though the element of propitiation is not absent, it is satisfied by the performance of definite rites. Finally, there have been included in this chapter a number of unimportant beliefs, the psychology of which cannot be analyzed.

What is the basis of those rites defined as Medicine, Magic, and Taboo? As already described, the *Bella Coola* either do not explain their origin and function, or merely state that *Aipenim* is responsible, as he is for every activity of life. This is unsatisfactory because many which, viewed scientifically, have neither curative nor causative power, produce the desired end. A child who has been "made" a carpenter during infancy, usually grows up to be proficient in that profession; the person

754
[755]
784
[576]

784

[789]

[788]

154 ●
771
789

- 154 who has been "cured" of an illness, recovers; the man whose
 791 death has been "caused" by magic, dies. An average white
 789 man would consider such statements to be erroneous, but they
 not only figure in stories and beliefs, but some of them have
 been actually observed by the writer. The explanation lies in
 the susceptibility of the Bella Coola to suggestion. The con-
 viction that he is to die so weakens a man that death often
 results; belief that he is to recover, aids a sick person to throw
 off the malady. This sentiment, intelligible in case of disease,
 is equally applicable in other matters. The child who has been
 [868] endowed with carpentry skill grows up with the conviction to
 assist his labours. Moreover, his relatives and friends are also
 aware of it, and he receives every opportunity to practise, so
 that the outcome desired is often the consequence of the act.
 757 Though the Bella Coola do not appreciate that psychological
 828 and sociological factors may be the real cause of the result,
 [771] they realize the importance of the power of thought. For
 example, if a group of people is unanimous in wishing some
 end, or expects some event to happen, it is believed that their
 thoughts are strong enough to bring about its occurrence. The
 following examples illustrate this point:

It is said that when the white man first came to British
 Columbia, a tribe of Indians was living in a secluded valley,
 far to the south. As more and more settlers arrived, the occu-
 pants were driven from their homes and forced into the barren
 mountains. One night, *Alquantim* came in a vision to one of
 [787] the natives, saying:

"I see what you desire; you want the white men to with-
 draw. You, yourself, are helpless. But if all your fellows wish
 the same, the white men will depart."

The man told all his friends and they agreed to concentrate
 the next night on their wish to expel the white man. A few
 failed to do so, and nothing happened. The second night there
 was the same lack of unanimity. The desire to drive away the
 intruders grew stronger in course of time, until one night this
 was the centre of the thoughts of all; next morning the white